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Charles Dickens' Heroines and Women-Folk:

SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING THEM.

A Lecture.

BY

CHARLES F. RIDEAL,

Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature; Member of Council of the Lecturers' Institute, etc.; Author of "Wellerisms," "People We Meet," etc.; Editor of "Women of the Time." Formerly Editor of "The Magazine and Book Review," etc.

SECOND AND REVISED EDITION.
WITH ORIGINAL DRAWINGS OF "EDITH DOMBEY" AND "DOT," BY MISS FLORENCE PASH.

THE ROXBURGHE PRESS,
3, Victoria Street,
Westminster.
1895.

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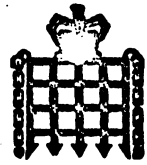

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TO

THE MEMORY OF

MY MOTHER.

OBIT. OCTOBER 4TH, 1894.

A TRUE HEROINE,

AND THE

BEST OF ALL WOMEN-FOLK.

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PREFATORY.

THIS Lecture* was originally issued in rough pamphlet form, reprinted from the Transactions of the Society before whom it was delivered, chiefly for the purpose of securing the copyright of a title, that I intend using for a much larger work on the same subject, and upon which I have been engaged for some time past.

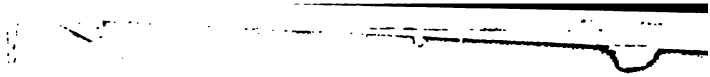
It is with considerable gratification

* Delivered before the Chemists' Assistants' Association, at 103, Great Russell Street, W.C.

that I note the exhaustion of the first edition, and that another is called for, which has given me the opportunity of revising and correcting the rather large number of typographical errors that were permitted to creep in.

CHARLES F. RIDEAL.

CHARLES DICKENS' HEROINES AND WOMEN-FOLK



examples of modern humour and fiction, the Wellers.

The encouragement I then received at the hands of this Association stimulated me to further effort, with the result that very shortly afterwards I was able to issue a little volume entitled "Wellerisms," which contained, I think, a tolerably complete history of those genial characters, together with what I venture to believe is a satisfactory compilation of their brightest and best sayings.

The larger and outside audience, the public, appear to have confirmed my former hearers' appreciation of my efforts, for, if I mistake not, the little work, whatever its faults—and it possesses many—has, as far at all events as the *publishers* are concerned—and it is now in its third edition—been a success, and, I trust,

also a source of amusement and interest to those who have ventured to peruse it.

To-night I come before you with some few thoughts, equally, if not more crude than my previous ones, concerning some other characters of Dickens' conception, with the hope that they will receive at your hands the same kindly consideration as did my last, for I intend at the first opportunity to follow them up, in the hope of being able, at some future time, to embody them in such a shape as will make them more presentable and acceptable to all lovers of this author.

Before proceeding to deliver to you these straggling impressions of my mind, I must ask your indulgence for a few words upon a matter not strictly confined to this lecture, but

which, on the other hand, has a direct bearing upon the author whose works I am dealing with; and they are somewhat of a personal kind.

In brief they are these: that I was considerably surprised and pained to hear from a paper recently read by the late Sir Patrick Colquhoun, the talented President of the Society whose Fellowship I have the honour and privilege to hold—

1st.—That Dickens was vulgar.

2nd.—That Dickens could not create a gentleman.

3rd.—That Dickens was not a humorist.

4th.—That Dickens was a snob!

I resented these remarks at the time very strongly (the audience, I am glad to say, being almost entirely with me), and frankly said that I feared that the learned President

knew little if anything at all about Dickens' writings, or he would not have committed himself to such unfounded and altogether unnecessary statements.

I should not have mentioned the subject at all (particularly as I intend dealing with it very fully in the shape of a magazine article, to be entitled "The Detractors of Dickens"), only, knowing that a discussion invariably follows the reading of a paper in this Association, it gives me an opportunity of bringing the four indictments before you in order that I may perhaps have the pleasure of hearing *your* opinion upon them. Personally, my views are these: I would infinitely prefer to pin my faith to those increasing thousands—shall I say millions?—who at this time read and re-read Dickens, and find in him not

only an entire absence of vulgarity, but a charming intellectual stimulus, in which middle-class life—the life of the greater bulk of the world—is faithfully and graphically depicted. Say that middle-class life is vulgar, then Dickens' writings *are* vulgar, but very few I think would be so prejudiced and so intrepid as to advance a charge of this kind against what, in every sense of the words employed, is the physique, the intellect, the backbone, the power of the country. To maintain that Dickens' characters are vulgar not only libels the revered memory of their author, but casts a reflection upon and insults us as a people.

To state that Dickens "could not create a gentleman" depends, of course, upon what a gentleman may be said to really consist of; the learned

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few? May I mention Pickwick? Great fates! is he not a gentleman, regard him from whatever point of view we choose?—the Wellers, Captain Cuttle, and hundreds of others? For Dickens had in reality only a few—a mere handful—of what might be truthfully termed *bad* characters, including such villains and humbugs as Carker, Sikes, Stiggins, Heep, and several others, who were intended to be thoroughly bad, for the sake of comparison only. But are not the three first mentioned sufficient to indicate that Dickens was quite capable of giving the proper place in fiction to the embodiment of sterling worth?

To answer the entirely empty charge that Dickens "was *not* a humorist" I would simply place in the hands of the sceptical ones a well-bound volume of that immortal work the

CHARLES DICKENS' HEROINES AND WOMEN-FOLK

about thirty years, Charles Dickens wrote thirty-three books, making, together with extraneous matter, a grand total of something like thirty thousand printed pages and three million words, we then have something approaching a faint glimmer of an idea of the immense amount of mental and physical labour he expended, and the work he somehow managed to get through—and all this apart from the very many calls upon his time in the shape of correspondence, the trying duties of editorship, speech-making, readings, and what not. This work, even regarded in its purely mechanical sense, almost appals us by its quantity.

I question whether we ever had a more devoted or a more prolific writer; I more than question whether we ever had a better or a more

popular one. When, coupled with this extraordinary amount of effort, we further realise that this great genius gave and bequeathed to us about fifteen hundred distinct and almost living characters, each one, whatever the particular position of him or her might be, fully capable of standing by itself as a separate, special, and distinct creation, bold, vivid, and original, we are stricken with astonishment, and can hardly credit the belief, but that the too self-evident facts support it, that this man was merely the outcome and the natural development of the tendencies of the large mind and still larger heart of the somewhat diminutive and "not too well cared for child," who obtained his primary knowledge of the world, its bitters, its sweets, its ups and its downs,

by the insignificant, and at its best the humiliating occupation of labelling blacking pots; but Shakespeare says—

"Genius dignifies whatever situation,
Still savours something greater than its place,
However low or high."

We, to hide our blushes and spare our feelings, dignify the degrading tendency of Dickens' earlier employment by the useful but often misapplied word "experience."

"I know," said Dickens himself, "how all these things have worked together to make me what I am; but I never forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget." The iron had thoroughly entered his soul, for his eldest daughter says: "When money troubles came upon his parents, the poor little fellow was

taken away from school, and for some time kept at an occupation most distasteful to him, with every surrounding that could jar on sensitive and refined feelings." Further, she says: "I have never heard him refer *in any way* to his own childish days, excepting in one instance, when he would tell his story of how, when he lived at Chatham, he and his father often passed Gad's Hill in their walks, and what an admiration he had for the red-brick house with its beautiful old cedar trees, and how it seemed to him to be larger and finer than any other house; how his father would" (with all the delicate Micawber-like flavour of his varied nature) "tell him that if he were to be *very* persevering and were to work *hard* he might perhaps, some day, come to live in it. I have heard him tell this

story over and over again, even when he had become the possessor of the very place which had taken such a hold upon his childish affections. Beyond this I cannot recall a single instance of any allusion being made *by him* to his own early childhood."

Of Dickens' younger days, his boyhood, his youth, and until the age of twenty-two—when appeared his first attempt at authorship (with the exception, as he states, of "certain tragedies achieved at the mature age of eight or ten, and represented with great applause to overflowing nurseries"), under the title of "Thoughts about People," what are now so widely known as the "Sketches by Boz," when he dropped "Mrs. Joseph Porter over the way" into the letter-box of the *Old Monthly Magazine*, the

office of which was situated in a dark corner of a dark street, leading into a dark square," and when it appeared in all the glory of print, and his eyes filled to their brims with tears of real delight as he wandered in the open daylight away up to Westminster"—until this time we are now all familiar (or ought to be) with his existence and history.

My particular business here to-night is to deal, not with the life or biography of Charles Dickens, but with the female portion, as it were, of the fifteen hundred creations alluded to, and amounting in themselves to about four hundred and twenty characters. There need be no cause for alarm—I shall not deal with every one, for the simple and effectual reason that I cannot; for even supposing that one minute of your time only were required for each character, it

would take me several hours to get through my task, and, believe me, I have not the slightest desire, much less the intention, to try your patience to the extent of keeping you here until the morning's small hours. I couldn't accomplish it, and I am afraid YOU wouldn't appreciate it, even if I could.

Dickens, to my mind, endeavoured, and nearly always accomplished his endeavours, to sketch his plot or production from *real* life, as there was an intention, an especial object to achieve, usually associated with his writings. At least, this is my opinion, founded upon a long and ardent study of his works.

Miss Georgina Hogarth (Dickens' wife's sister), however, differs from me in this most openly, for in a very courteous letter I received from her some little time ago she says: "You

are quite mistaken in supposing that *every* character in his (Dickens') books was a portrait of some real person. There were frequent INDICATIONS of *several* people in a single character. Mrs. Nickleby, for example, I believe was a compound of two or three women, but *all* his characters were TYPES, and not actual people.

"Dora, of course, I know was taken from a lady with whom he was very much in love at a very early age, and I knew her well afterwards as a married woman. Mrs. Pipchin was also *almost* a portrait of a real woman, with whom C.D. and his sister stayed when they were children. As to Mrs. Gamp 'being the original of a nurse who had attended a very distinguished lady friend of the author,' I can only say that it is quite an untrue statement. Mrs. Gamp was only a too

true presentment of the ordinary sick nurse of those days" (by the way, Mrs. Gamp's supposed residence is close by here, Kingsgate Street, Holborn, over Poll Sweedlepipes, the barber's. There is a hair-dresser there still. The bedroom window appears just the requisite height for the late Mr. S. Carter Hall, Mr. Pecksniff's supposed prototype, to throw stones up at), "a type which I trust is very rare in these times.

"Whether Miss Flite was an actual person or not I cannot say, but such unfortunate lunatics were very constantly to be seen in the Court of Chancery in former years.

"Miss Moucher was taken from a real person, as Charles Dickens explained himself—but only in part—and only the external of that." "If I were you," Miss Hogarth says, "I

should treat your 'Heroines and Women-Folk' from a purely fictitious point of view."

I am afraid that I cannot accept Miss Hogarth's request or suggestion, particularly as she contradicts herself a little in her own letter (although I am duly grateful and thankful to her for the view she herself has presented of the matter), especially in the face of the following: He gave us "Oliver Twist." Why? Because, in his own words, "I saw no reason when I wrote this why the *dregs* of life should not serve the purpose of a moral as well as its froth and cream"; his manly and independent argument for doing so being that "there are people, however, of so refined and delicate a nature, that they cannot bear the contemplation of such horrors. Not that they turn instinctively from crime; but

that criminal characters, to suit them, must be, like their meat, in delicate disguise. A Massaroni in green velvet is an enchanting creature; but a Sikes in fustian is insupportable. A Mrs. Massaroni, being a lady in short petticoats and a fancy dress, is a thing to imitate in tableaux and have in lithograph on pretty songs; but a Nancy, being a creature in a cotton gown and cheap shawl, is not to be thought of. It is wonderful how Virtue turns from dirty stockings; and how Vice, married to ribbons and a little gay attire, changes her name, as wedded ladies do, and becomes Romance.

"But as the stern truth, even in the dress of this (in novels) much exalted race, was a part of the purpose of this book, I did not, for these readers, abate one hole in the Dodger's coat, or one scrap of curl-paper in Nancy's

dishevelled hair. I had no faith in the delicacy which could not bear to look upon them. I had no desire to make proselytes among such people. I had no respect for their opinion, good or bad; did not covet their approval; and did not write for their amusement."

"Barnaby Rudge" was written because "no accounts of the Gordon Riots had been, to my knowledge, introduced into any work of fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary and remarkable features, I was led to project the tale." He says very prettily that "the raven in this story is a compound of two great originals, of whom I was, at different times, the proud possessor.

"The first of the ravens was in the bloom of his youth when he was discovered in a modest retirement in

London, by a friend of mine, and given to me. He had from the first, as Sir Hugh Evans says of Anne Page, 'good gifts,' which he improved by study and attention in a most exemplary manner. He slept in a stable—generally on horseback—and so terrified a Newfoundland dog by his preternatural sagacity that he has been known, by the mere superiority of his genius, to walk off unmolested with the dog's dinner, from before his face.

"He was rapidly rising in acquirements and virtues when, in an evil hour, his stable was newly painted. He observed the workmen closely, saw that they were careful of the paint, and immediately burned to possess it. On their going to dinner, he ate up all that they had left behind, consisting of a pound or two of white

lead; and this youthful indiscretion terminated in death.

"While I was yet inconsolable for his loss, another friend of mine in Yorkshire discovered an older and more gifted raven at a village public-house, which he prevailed upon the landlord to part with for a consideration, and sent up to me. The first act of this sage was to administer the effects of his predecessor, by disinterring all the cheese and halfpence he had buried in the garden—a work of immense labour and research, to which he devoted all the energies of his mind. When he had achieved his task, he applied himself to the acquisition of stable language, in which he soon became such an adept that he would perch outside my window and drive imaginary horses, with great skill, all day. Per-

haps even I never saw him at his best, for his former master sent his duty with him, 'and if I wished the bird to come out very strong, would I be so good as to show him a drunken man,' which I never did, having (unfortunately) none but sober people at hand. But I could hardly have respected him more, whatever the stimulating influences of this sight might have been. He had not the least respect, I am sorry to say, for me in return, or for anybody but the cook; to whom he was attached, but only, I fear, as a policeman might have been. Once, I met him unexpectedly about half-a-mile from my house, walking down the middle of a public street attended by a pretty large crowd, and spontaneously exhibiting the whole of his accomplishments. His gravity under those trying circumstances I

can never forget, nor the extraordinary gallantry with which, refusing to be brought home, he defended himself behind a pump, until overpowered by numbers. It may have been that he was too bright a genius to live long, or it may have been that he took some pernicious substance into his bill, and thence into his maw—which is not improbable, seeing that he new-pointed the greater part of the garden wall by digging out the mortar, broke countless squares of glass by scraping away the putty all round the frames, and tore up and swallowed, in splinters, the greater part of a wooden staircase of six steps and a landing—but after some three years he too was taken ill, and died before the kitchen fire. He kept his eye to the last upon the meat as it roasted, and suddenly turned over on his back with a sepulchral cry

of 'Cuckoo!' Since then I have been ravenless."

"Nicholas Nickleby" was the outcome of his experiences of education in general, and Yorkshire schools in particular. He relates that "of the monstrous neglect of education in England, and the disregard of it by the State as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men, private schools long afforded a notable example. Although any man who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life, was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere; although preparation for the functions he undertook was required in the surgeon who assisted to bring a boy into the world, or might one day assist, perhaps, to send him out of it; in the chemist, the attorney, the butcher, the baker, the

candlestick-maker; the whole round of crafts and trades, the schoolmaster excepted; and although schoolmasters, as a race, were the blockheads and impostors who might naturally be expected to spring from such a state of things, and to flourish in it; these Yorkshire schoolmasters were the lowest and most rotten round in the whole ladder. Traders in the avarice, indifference, or imbecility of parents, and the helplessness of children; ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog; they formed the worthy corner-stone of a structure which, for absurdity and a magnificent high-minded neglect, has rarely been exceeded in the world."

"Bleak House" was a revelation of the abominable system then reigning

at the Court of Chancery, "and not, I regret to say, even now greatly improved upon," he tells us; "but as it is wholesome that the parsimonious public should know what has been doing, and still is doing, in this connection, I mention here that everything set forth in these pages concerning the Court of Chancery is substantially true, and within the truth. The case of Gridley is in no essential altered from one of actual occurrence, made public by a disinterested person who was professionally acquainted with the whole of the monstrous wrong from beginning to end. At the present moment* there is a suit before the Court which was commenced nearly twenty years ago, in which from thirty to forty counsel have been known to appear at one

* August, 1853.

time, in which costs have been incurred to the amount of seventy thousand pounds, which is a *friendly suit*, and which is (I am assured) no nearer to its termination now than when it was begun. There is another well-known suit in Chancery, not yet decided, which was commenced before the close of the last century, and in which more than double the amount of seventy thousand pounds has been swallowed up in costs. If I wanted other authorities for Jarndyce and Jarndyce, I could rain them on these pages, to the shame of—a parsimonious public"; and of the "Tale of Two Cities" he declares: "Whenever any reference (however slight) is made here to the condition of the French people before or during the Revolution, it is truly made on the faith of trustworthy witnesses. It has been one of my

hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book."

These few examples are, I think, quite sufficient to prove that there is at least some groundwork for my assertion that Dickens invariably, if not always, wrote from *real* life. As with the plot, so is it with the characters taking part therein; each and every one have in my opinion their origin in something tangible.

Mr. Kitton informs us that "the old lady in the 'Sketches by Boz' was a Mrs. Newnham, who lived at No. 5, Ordnance Terrace, Chatham, and it is generally supposed that Mrs. Nickleby is a portrait of Mrs. John Dickens, the novelist's mother." A writer says

that Mrs. Dickens had been very nice-looking in her youth. She was a little woman, thoroughly good-natured, easy-going, and companionable, and the likeness between her and Mrs. Nickleby is simply the exaggerations of some slight peculiarities. "She possessed an extraordinary sense of the ludicrous, and her power of imitation was something quite astonishing. On entering a room she almost unconsciously took an inventory of its contents, and if anything happened to strike her as out of place or ridiculous, she would afterwards describe it in the quaintest possible manner. In like manner she noted the personal peculiarities of her friends and acquaintances. She had also a fine vein of pathos, and could bring tears to the eyes of listeners when narrating some sad event.

"And as the original of Miss La Creevy, the good-natured little miniature-painter, I would suggest Miss Rose Emma Drummond, who practised the same genteel profession at the time 'Nickleby' was written. This suggestion carries some weight on the discovery of the interesting fact that, in 1835 (about three years prior to the commencement of the novel), Dickens sat to Miss Drummond for his portrait on ivory, which was executed as an engagement present for Miss Catherine Hogarth, afterwards Mrs. Charles Dickens.

"One of the most amusing characters in the 'Old Curiosity Shop' is that of the small slipshod girl who wore 'a dirty coarse apron and bib, which left nothing of her visible but her face and feet,' and who was called 'The Marchioness' by that choice

spirit, Mr. Richard Swiveller, in order 'to make it seem more real and pleasant.' The novelist took his first impression of this domestic young person from a maid-of-all-work possessed by the Dickens family when living in Bayham Street, Camden Town. She was an orphan from the Chatham Workhouse, and continued to wait upon her employers during their incarceration in the Debtors' Prison. Like young Charles Dickens, 'she had a lodging in the neighbourhood [of the prison], that she might be early on the scene of her duties; and when Charles met her, as he would do occasionally, in his lounging-place by London Bridge, he would occupy the time before the gates opened by telling her quite astonishing fictions about the wharves and the tower.'

"In the preface to an early edition

of 'Martin Chuzzlewit,' Dickens speaks of Mrs. Gamp as a fair representation, at the time the book was published, of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness; but, as Mr. Forster says, 'he might have added that the rich were no better off, for Mrs. Gamp's original was in reality a person hired by a most distinguished friend of his own, a lady, to take charge of an invalid very dear to her; and the common habit of this nurse in the sick-room, among other Gampish peculiarities, was to rub her nose along the top of the tall fender.' In spite of Mrs. Gamp's propensity for stimulants, and other human weaknesses, we cannot resist the humorous side of her character, nor deny that she is a general favourite.

"It has already been said that Dickens, when a mere lad, lodged

near the Debtors' Prison during his father's incarceration there. Before he lived with the originals of the Garland family, he was handed over to a reduced old lady long known to his parents, a Mrs. Roylance, who took children in to board, and had done so at Brighton. With a few alterations and embellishments, this lady unconsciously sat for Mrs. Pipchin in 'Dombey and Son,' when she took in young Charles Dickens. The well-known illustration, representing Mrs. Pipchin and Paul at the fire, greatly distressed the author, because 'Phiz' failed to realise the scene as the former had conceived it. 'He felt the disappointment more keenly, because the conception of the grim old boarding-house keeper had taken back his thoughts to the miseries of his own child-life, and

made her, as her prototype in verity was, a part of the terrible reality.' In his paper of notes for the number in which she appears are the various names, beginning with that of her real prototype, out of which, by a process of evolution, the name selected came to him at last—'Mrs. Roylance, Mrs. Wrychin, Mrs. Tipchin, Mrs. Alchin, Mrs. Somching, Mrs. Pipchin.' In a letter to Mrs. Forster he wrote: 'I hope you will like Mrs. Pipchin's establishment. It is from the life, and I was there—I don't suppose I was eight years old; but I remember it all as well, and certainly understood it as well, as I do now.' In the picture referred to, Paul presents a striking contrast to the grim old harridan at whose face he looks with an expression half anxious and half timid, 'studying every line and

wrinkle of her countenance, and peering at the hard grey eye. . . . The good old lady might have been a witch . . . and Paul and her cat two familiars, as they all sat by the fire together.'

"Dora Spenlow, David Copperfield's 'child-wife,' was drawn from a living person, for Dickens, too, had his Dora in 1829, who, like David's *fiancée*, was 'striven for as the one only thing to be attained, and even more unattainable, for neither did he succeed, nor, happily, did she die; but the one idol, like the other, supplying a motive to exertion for the time, and otherwise opening out to the idolater, both in fact and fiction, a highly unsubstantial, happy, foolish time.' A letter from Dickens to his biographer confirms the statement that the Dora n fiction is founded on a Dora in fact.

The description of Flora, in 'Little Dorrit,' was derived from the same original.

"'The prototype of Miss Dartle may also be partly traced. In the story, that lady is described as possessing 'a slight, short figure, dark, and not agreeable to look at, but with some appearance of good looks too. . . . She had black hair, and eager black eyes, was thin, and had a scar upon her lip.' We have Mrs. Forster's authority for stating that it was from one of Dickens' lady friends, very familiar to him indeed, but whose name is not divulged, that he copied Miss Dartle's peculiarity 'of never saying anything outright, but hinting it merely, and making more of it that way.'

"Of the original of Miss Moucher something interesting may be told. Readers of 'Copperfield' will re-

member her as 'a pursy dwarf, of about forty or forty-five, with a very large head and face, a pair of roguish grey eyes, and such extremely little arms. Her chin, which is what is called a double chin, was so fat that it entirely swallowed up the strings of her bonnet, bow and all. Throat she had none; waist she had none; legs she had none worth mentioning; for though she was more than full sized down to where her waist would have been, if she had any, and though she terminated as human beings generally do, in a pair of feet, she was so short, that she stood at a common sized chair as at a table.' Dickens, thinking that a grotesque little oddity among his acquaintances would be safe from recognition, had given way to the temptation of copying too closely the peculiarities of her face and figure.

Although in Miss Moucher's 'Ain't I volatile' his friends had quite correctly recognised the favourite expression of a different person, and other traits were not hers at all, yet he was shocked and grieved to discover that he had given pain to a person who saw in Miss Moucher a strong resemblance to herself, and speedily remedied, as far as was practicable, the injury he had unintentionally inflicted, by making certain alterations in the subsequent portrayal of the character.

"One of the suitors in the great case of Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce was 'a little old woman in a squeezed bonnet, who is always in Court, from its sitting to its rising, and always expecting some incomprehensible judgment to be given in her favour. . . . She carries some small litter in a

reticule which she calls her documents; principally consisting of paper matches and dry lavender.' The name of the 'little old lady' was Flite, and her portrait was taken from life. One who knew her well informs me that she was always hovering in and about the Chancery Courts, generally in Court, and that she was the victim of some prolonged Chancery suit which had turned her head."

I believe that this little old lady has only recently died. I daresay many of you would remember the notice of her death in the daily papers.

"In the unfinished story of 'Edwin Drood,' considered by Longfellow as one of the novelist's most beautiful works, there are given but very slight indications of the prototypes of the characters. The picture of

the opium-eater and her den was drawn from nature, the former being thus described by Mr. Fields, who accompanied the novelist to the spot: 'We found a haggard old woman blowing at a kind of pipe made of an old ink-bottle; and the words that Dickens puts into the mouth of this wretched creature in "Edwin Drood," we heard her croon as we leaned over the tattered bed in which she was lying.'"

I hope that thus I have also satisfactorily advanced my further assertion.

With the dozen or so of the conceptions to which I have just alluded, we are all well acquainted. To these as presented, I can neither add nor take away from the great interest attached to them. I might, however, have given you quotations from the

respective works containing these characters, but these you can obtain for yourselves and do much more justice to in the reading thereof than I. To deal with the whole of the characters in a single evening is, I have already stated, physically impossible. Why, Miss Wardle and her fur-topped boots, the middle-aged lady with the yellow curl-papers, Mrs. Gamp's confidential companion and mentor whom we never see, namely Mrs. Harris, and Betty Higden, who, with Mr. Slopper, turned the mangle in "Our Mutual Friend," Sam Weller's pretty sweetheart Mary—these alone, mere minor characters as they are in comparison to the several hundred others, would occupy all our evening in order to do full justice to them; therefore I must limit my selection, however much otherwise

disposed, and devote my attention—and this I do almost exclusively—to the two female characters (essentially opposites) which in my humble opinion represent our gifted author in his best style by their supreme excellence; these two characters are Edith Dombey, and "Dot," otherwise Mrs. John Peerybingle. My choice may be wrong; I can, however, hardly suspect it to be so, because these personages have so endeared themselves to us, and are so expressive of life and reality, as they are, and as they should be, in their respective spheres, that if my judgment is in error, well! I must be differently constituted to most other people.

Well, we know the issue of the long and painful story, in "Dombey and Son," the finest piece of word-painting in the whole of Dickens'

writings—how a trusting woman, gentle in spirit, sweet by nature, and qualified in person, by the highest instincts of love and nobility, to shine and shed her radiance upon the world at large, having been urged, or rather forced, into a contract utterly odious to her, battles with her feelings in the vain hope and for the sake only of the little one who is so dear to her, that she may be permitted to live even with the man she hates, in some peaceful and understood manner; how, this last hope being refused, and her proud spirit then rebelling against the stiff-necked and heartless husband, she seeks a revenge, and quits the scene in a manner that is terrible in its dramatic reality. We cannot even in her despair help admiring Edith Dombey, but the admiration, considerably qualified, is

of a kind which is almost akin to pity, for we miss, even in that strong, self-willed woman, the power to say *no* at the proper time, and on the right occasion, and we more than wonder, in the undoubted inflexible imperiousness of her nature, how it was she allowed herself to yield, and apparently so easily, to her marriage with Mr. Dombey.

This story is just a little *unlike* Dickens; he should have coupled Edith with a correspondingly lovable disposition, and thus developed in their entirety the better characteristics of her constitution. But then the world is made up of extremes, and the treatment of the heroine as I suggest would have failed to have given us the intensely clever description of that unusually precocious villain, Carker, and we should have lost the

chastened influence which, in after years, subdued even the hardest and most impenetrable, for do we not learn at the close of the narrative that :—

"Autumn days are shining, and on the sea-beach there are often a young lady and a white-haired gentleman. With them, or near them, are two children: boy and girl. And an old dog is generally in their company.

"The white-haired gentleman walks with the little boy, talks with him, helps him in his play, attends upon him, watches him, as if he were the object of his life. If he be thoughtful, the white-haired gentleman is thoughtful too; and sometimes when the child is sitting by his side, and looks up in his face, asking him questions, he takes the tiny hand in his, and holding it, forgets to answer. Then the child says :—

"'What, grandpapa! Am I so like my poor little uncle again?'

"'Yes, Paul. But he was weak, and you are very strong.'

"'Oh yes, I am very strong.'

"'And he lay on a little bed beside the sea, and you can run about.'

"And so they range away again, busily, for the white-haired gentleman likes best to see the child free and stirring; and as they go about together, the story of the bond between them goes about, and follows them.

"But no one, except Florence, knows the measure of the white-haired gentleman's affection for the girl. That story never goes about. The child herself almost wonders at a certain secrecy he keeps in it. He hoards her in his heart. He cannot bear to see a cloud upon her face. He cannot bear to see her sit apart. He fancies that she feels a slight, when there is none. He steals away to look at her, in her sleep. It pleases him to have her come, and wake him in the morning. He is fondest of her and most loving to her, when there is no creature by. The child says then, sometimes:—

"'Dear grandpapa, why do you cry when you kiss me?'

"He only answers, 'Little Florence! Little Florence!' and smoothes away the curls that shade her earnest eyes."

The white-haired gentleman is Mr. Dombey.

In that delicious little sketch, indeed a very poem, "The Cricket on the Hearth," we have a character of quite another description and order altogether. We have in "Dot" one of the most charming delineations of a perfectly frank, open, and trusting nature, who rules supreme, not by the mere force of will and disposition, but by the natural attributes of a loving heart.

Everybody in that tale is under the influence of this delightful little woman's witching spell.

Tilly Slowboy bumps the baby's head and says "ketcher, ketcher!"

with more vigour than ever she would have done if "Dot" had not been her mistress.

Mrs. Dot, senior, cuts short her unpleasant recollections of the failure in the indigo trade only under "Dot's" soulful sway.

The carrier himself, a great, rough, big-hearted man, "couldn't help it," and became wax-like in her hands; and do you think that Caleb Plummer would have *dared* to have asked permission to pinch Boxer's tail, even ever such a little bit, if it had been anybody else but "Dot" he had to deal with? and would Mr. Tackleton (I appeal to you as reasonable thinking people) ever have skimmed across to Mrs. Fielding and danced around the room, pumping a veritable new life into his old one, if it had not been for "Dot"?

Why, even the "cricket joined the

music with its chirp, and the very kettle hummed."

From these two examples alone, so different in themselves, and from two totally different walks or stations of life, we are enabled to learn a *little* as to how Dickens managed to gain such a hold upon the attentions and affections of his many readers, by his pictures of women. He gave us, I feel more than ever convinced, nothing but what he experienced or knew, or what took place in the world individually around him. Above all things, he was natural; he hated cant and loathed hypocrisy. His heroines and women-folk are true specimens of everyday womanhood. We meet, even in these times of be-trousered females and supposed enlightenment, with an occasional Edith Dombey; not many,

because we feel and hope that a little more firmness permeates the class of society from which she was taken. We still have the "froth and the cream" left to us, but we ought rather to make the most of it, and see whether below the surface of every one of us there is not a something to be turned to good account, something to be made useful, something to teach us still further that the destiny which awaits us is, though devious and uncertain, a destiny devised by an inscrutable Being who doeth all things in His own peculiar way for our own peculiar good.

Of this I am certain, that for every *one* of the many gruffest of the Tackletons that exist in our midst, there are *dozens*, nay, *hundreds*, of the bright, true, and tender-hearted little

women, the "Dots," who, by their smiling, cheerful influence, turn our hearts and feelings topsy-turvy, and bring us out of ourselves brighter and more blithesome than ever we thought we should, could, or might be.

"I wrote this story," Dickens said, speaking of the "Cricket on the Hearth," "to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts never out of season in a Christian land;" and *I* believe, *you* believe, *everybody* believes, and *must* believe, that he wrote ALL his works for the self-same noble, inspiring, and useful purpose.

DISCUSSION.

DISCUSSION.

THE Chairman, Mr. PHILP, said it was seldom that the members of the Association were led so far from the strict paths of pharmacy on such an enjoyable excursion into the green fields of literature as they had been that evening. Some would perhaps remember the interesting paper Mr. Rideal had given them some three years before.

Personally, Dickens was his (the speaker's) favourite author, and he knew of no novelist to whom one could return time after time with

more appreciation than to him. As chemists, they should, especially those who were interested in the granting of more advantages to Chemists and Druggists, feel indebted to Dickens for his reference to the compulsory attendance of a country chemist on a jury.

He had often heard it urged against Dickens that he was a very superficial observer, and that his writings were covered with a film of emotion, but had no real depth of sentiment; that his characters were, some of them, absurdly impossible, and others enormously exaggerated. He was glad to find that Mr. Rideal confirmed his belief in the reality of, at least, the majority of Dickens' characters. Have we not all met a Pecksniff, a Chadband, or, more rarely, a Cheeryble, and occasionally a Weller? while it

is stated that on the publication of "Nicholas Nickleby," the author received several letters from Yorkshire schoolmasters threatening him with proceedings for libel. And surely there is real depth of feeling in "Bleak House," "Dombey and Son," and many others.

One point Mr. Rideal had not mentioned. He had recently seen it stated that Dickens was that *rara avis*, a gentlemanly editor, and that when approached in that capacity he lost none of that kindness and genial courtesy which were so characteristic of him.

This was not a paper which could call for much discussion from the meeting. It had given him very great pleasure to listen to it, and he would be glad if any present would add a few words, either of corrobora-

tion or interrogation, in which case he knew Mr. Rideal would be pleased to answer.

Mr. W. L. WILLIAMS said he had not come primed with any remarks upon Dickens or his works; his intention was passive in character, and he was present simply as a listener. Mr. Rideal, however, had given those whose fortune it was to hear him so admirable an epitome of much of Dickens' work, and so interesting an account of the more prominent womenfolk introduced into his novels, that he felt compelled to make an acknowledgment of personal gratification.

Without desiring to discuss the paper in any way, perhaps they would permit him to offer a few remarks upon some thoughts that had occurred to him whilst Mr. Rideal was reading.

Speaking broadly, the pharmacist who desires to be abreast of the times has none too much leisure for the indulgence of a passion for light literature; still, as a matter of national duty, certain authors should be studied, and he ventured to think Dickens was of the number.

In some of Dickens' works he had experienced a curious feeling of want of interest in the earlier portions of the books, and it required a considerable effort of will power to enable him to proceed; he found, however, as progress was made so did the feeling of antipathy fade, until eventually the characters and their situations assumed a fascination all their own.

Dickens has been adversely criticised as an author who was "hysterically emotional"; he took it the same remark must be applied to every writer who

succeeds in depicting so naturally the highest and deepest of head and heart.

Whilst upon this point he would remark that the fullest appreciation of Dickens' works seemed to be derived from reading aloud; and if to a sympathetic audience (which need not exceed one in number), the pleasure might be still further enhanced.

Mr. Rideal had mentioned his favourites amongst the heroines of Dickens, and he (the speaker) would not dispute the high place given to them; he had his own likings, and they lay with Agnes in "David Copperfield" and Esther in "Bleak House."

Remarkable as Dickens was as a writer, he was phenomenal in making after-dinner speeches, an accomplishment not to be despised. Mr. Williams

concluded by proposing a most hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Rideal for his paper.

Mr. F. W. GOODMAN seconded, and it was passed unanimously, Mr. RIDEAL making a suitable reply.

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